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ABSTRACT

This paper consists of a speech delivered on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the University of Rhode Island (URI) that proposes a new structure for the future of that institution. The paper opens by describing the questions and discussion raised in the past year by the onset of the anniversary. Also touched on is the early history of the university, a reflection on the changing nature of global relations and national economic forces, and the increased importance of knowledge of the economic picture, which suggests changes in the structure and role of universities. In the course of a discussion of the importance of educational quality the Total Quality Management approach to institutional organization is proposed as a desirable model and the current movement at URI to adopt this program and to establish an "Academy for Quality" that will research and teach the various elements of quality management to and for the university community is described. A consideration of the conflict between the needs of research institutions and lack of funding culminates in a proposal to solve the conflict between research and lack of funding by reorganizing the institution into eight faculty and student research centers conceptualized broadly as teams with a mission and implementing many of the most effective practices for student learning. (JB)

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Recreating the Research University: Cutting the Gordian Knot

Robert L. Carothers

January 17, 1992

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Recreating the Research University: Cutting the Gordian Knot

Robert L. Carothers

January 17, 1992

Chairman Kahn and Members of the University of Rhode Island Faculty Senate; Governor Sundlun; Governor Corr and members of the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education; Commissioner Petrocelli and members of his staff; Senators and Representative of the Rhode Island legislature; Faculty, Staff, Students and Alumni of the University; ladies and gentlemen:

A funny thing happened to us on the way to the inauguration of the tenth president of the University of Rhode Island in this its one-hundredth year, its Centennial of service to the people of Rhode Island, the people of America and, indeed, the people of the world. On the way to that celebratory event, planned for most of a year by a committee of dedicated folks and ably chaired by Dr. Breck Peters of our Sociology Department, we confronted some hard realities, realities that caused us to put our priorities in order, and to prove both to ourselves and to those watching us for leadership, that we can decide, that we can make choices consistent with our purpose and our values.

The response to the decision to forego the inauguration has been instructive. The editorials and talk shows, the calls and letters we have received, all suggest that Rhode Island is more ready than we have been for years to make decisions, decisions which set substance over appearances, service over self-interest. Throughout the University community, I have heard old-timers and newcomers, chemists and cooks, say that it is time, finally, to make choices. Quite unexpectedly, the reaction has been most encouraging, and I want to express my appreciation to the members of the Board of Governors and to the Commissioner for their support of our decision and for their continuing leadership on behalf of higher education in this troubled state. I want especially to thank the Faculty Senate for their resolution of support and for calling this Convocation here today, a convocation that allows for a more frank discussion than the grand style of an inauguration replete with guests from around the country might permit. This speech is for family.

Still, I want to say that in spite of all our challenges, the University is having a big birthday--a once-in-a-lifetime birthday--and we would not want to skip the party entirely. The kind of party a community of teachers and learners really likes to have began two nights ago when Ernest Boyer brought us his analysis of American education in the new decade. It continued last night with Brian Dickenson, Senator Pell, Admiral Turner, President Strasser and Daniel Schorr probing the new world order being created with dizzying speed even as we speak. This party will go on into the next two weeks, as we explore the future of the environment, the

arts, international business, our increasingly diverse American culture and finally ourselves again, the emerging American university. It should be a month to give us grist for debate and discussion for the year, as if our faculty and students did not have sufficient opinions already. Our brand of spirited discourse, however, contributes to the kind of lively public life that makes the University of Rhode Island a wonderful place to learn and to grow.

During this past week and indeed over this past year, we have talked a great deal about vision, and this speech has been billed as my vision for the University of Rhode Island. The new Episcopal chaplain on campus, Norman MacLeod, even sent me before the holidays the lines from Proverbs, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." But even as we are certain that we need a vision, yet we remain uncertain about just what a vision is. In complex organizations like ours, we struggle with these kinds of concepts, with mission and purpose, goals and objectives, standards and assessment thereof, strategic plans and long range plans. But a vision, a vision as the ancient Hebrews must have meant it, is itself creative; it is generative, shaping, almost as a work of art which radiates meaning and generates purpose. This vision is rich with values, embodies the beliefs of a people or a nation or an university like ours. It becomes a "first principle" or cluster of "first principles" which shapes the future and transforms us.

So we at the University of Rhode Island seek a vision for our future, a vision informed by a tradition now one hundred years old, and yet appropriate to a state, nation and world where change is the one constant upon which we can rely. In the beginning, it was precisely because of the forces of change hard at work that the Rhode Island Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry pressed upon the General Assembly in 1863 the need to create educational opportunity for the sons and daughters of the "industrial classes." But, in classic Rhode Island style, it was not until after nearly thirty years of intrigue that the Rhode Island College for Agriculture and Mechanic Arts was created by an act of the General Assembly and the cannon fire of celebration rang through the streets of Kingston.

The change in 1892 centered on the shift from an agricultural society to an industrial economy, and from a state populated by Yankees to one increasingly made up of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, speaking a bevy of languages and adhering to diverse social, political and religious views. Today, too, we wrestle with the shift to an economy based on information, where **knowledge** has become the strategic resource for the creation of new wealth and new jobs. The demographics of our state and our nation are again changing, as people who are the children of Africa and

Asia and Latin America provide the infusion of raucous energy that both frustrates and rejuvenates those longer on the land. Geo-political realities shift rapidly as well, and we now say easily that we live in a global marketplace both for goods and for ideas. Nothing appears to be unthinkable, nothing beyond the realm of possibility, possibility for both good and ill, lightness and the dark.

In such a future, surely even society's most cherished institutions must change as well. But what, we ask ourselves nearly every day, will such change involve and what will successful enterprises look and act like in the new order. Concretely, what is this University to do, if it is to serve Rhode Island and America well and if it is to prosper. While the rate of change we are experiencing cautions us against the adoption of some firm and final model for the future, some answers to our questions are now emerging.

If we accept the almost unrefutable premise that the American economy is now centered on the creation, processing and distribution of knowledge, we must also admit that the hierarchical organizational structures and authoritarian leadership styles that worked in the resources economy or the industrial economy simply don't work well in a society in which new ideas and creative responses to constantly changing challenges are of prime value. If we accept the fact that we are a part of a global economy, where competition for customers or clients knows no national boundaries, we must also admit that the power in that marketplace has shifted from sellers to buyers. We must acknowledge that people have more choices than ever before and that they are now exercising that power to chose in ways that threaten the standard of living we in America have had for most of this century. It is clear that America can no longer dictate its terms in this world marketplace, that we must compete on our merits, that we must deliver to that marketplace goods and services, ideas and art, that meet the test of <u>quality</u>, the standard on which empowered buyers now make choices.

Within our own lifetime we have seen born, lost, and then rediscovered in America the paradigm which produces such quality. Quality organizations and enterprises, we now know again, are shaped by a vision and based on clearly articulated values, not on authority or power. Successful organizations and enterprises are replacing authority with communication, hierarchy with networks, chain of command with collaborative and cooperative teamwork. Quality organizations and enterprises operate from an ethic of service, as defined through a continuous loop of communication between those served and those serving. Constant improvement is the standard to which all parties are committed. Quality organizations tap the creative energy of their members by

empowering them to make decisions and to act on those decisions, replacing the inhibiting force of fear with the knowledge that members are part of a team dedicated to solving problems in process, not to blaming people for problems beyond their ability or authority to correct. And quality organizations recognize and reward the work of people who advance the vision of the enterprise and whose imaginations serve the cause to which the organization is dedicated.

Now many people both inside and outside the academy have asked how this model--developed for commercial enterprise--can be adapted to a university. Let's admit, they say, that universities are among the least efficient and most disorganized institutions in our society. Isn't it true, they say, that universities are really just chaotic collections of eccentric people held together by a common concern for parking? Aren't the employees--especially the faculty--aggressive, articulate, even quarrelsome, trained to challenge authority, whether that authority is scientific or scholarly or political, and just generally impossible to manage? Isn't the definition of a faculty member a person who won't take yes for an answer?

And it's true that universities are indeed difficult organizations to manage in the conventional sense of what it means to manage, particularly with practices that rely upon authority and power. But universities also contain very important lessons about what it means to manage, to lead and to succeed in the new era, an era in which free inquiry, free speech, creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit will be much more important to us than ever before.

On the campus, power and authority, as any university president will tell you, are purely illusory. Charles William Eliott is said once to have made a remark at Harvard regarding <u>his</u> faculty. The next morning he was confronted at his office door by a delegation of the faculty who pointed out to him that the President of Harvard does not have a faculty. Rather, the faculty at Harvard have a president. Despite the printed table of organization, an University is not a hierarchy but a very pluralistic community with multiple centers of influence more potent than any official authority. A university is held together by shared values. It is a purposeful community, and it employs powerful symbols which seek to bind that community together, symbols displayed, for example, on Saturday afternoons in autumn or in the regalia worn at commencements each May.

A university is highly reliant upon the individual talents and motivation of its faculty, who must take independent action on a continuing basis, independent action which is at the same time consistent with the unifying vision of the organization. A

university places great emphasis upon the continuing development of its employees, and supports professional development through such devices as sabbatical leaves and individually directed research at a level unheard of in most enterprises.

In brief, in its essence the university is a pretty good illustration of the quality paradigm, and in many areas of this University we are already practicing the principles of quality management. We have much yet to learn, of course, but we are quick studies and we will soon know more, as we gain understanding of how quality can be achieved in every aspect of our work. I believe that total quality management or TQM is a good fit for this University, and that we can advance the cause of quality, especially quality service, not only on our campuses but throughout Rhode Island as well.

For the past six months, we have been seeking a vehicle to make that happen, one somewhat different from the model used in the corporate sector, one more compatible with the culture of an academic institution. Today, I am pleased to announce that the University of Rhode Island will create an "Academy for Quality," which will research and teach the various elements of quality management to and for our own community. The Academy for Quality will be the primary training vehicle for all members of the University's staff, and we will make it available to all public employees in the State of Rhode Island, so that the lessons of quality can help restore the people's faith in the competence and integrity of state government and help restore to all government employees their sense of pride in public service.

After discussing in detail this concept with our colleagues in the Faculty Senate and with the leadership of the unions which represent our employees, we will appoint a Board of Directors for the Academy, and that Board will design and adopt the basic curriculum of the Academy. In addition to the core curriculum, the Academy will develop and deliver quality training programs specific to the various work of the people attending the Academy.

The staff of the Academy for Quality will be drawn chiefly from members of the University of Rhode Island community, although we will recruit talent to help us wherever we can find it. University employees who teach in the Academy would be released from other duties to deliver the curriculum in offerings which would range in length from an hour to a week. The Academy will also support research by members of our faculty interested in developing a body of knowledge in this important new area of study.

The "students" of the Academy, the public employees of Rhode Island, will be granted "scholarships" to cover the costs of their

professional development. These scholarships will be funded from a central training budget and will be matched by the department or agency with which the employee is associated. Those who complete the program will be granted a "quality diploma" certifying that the recipient has completed quality training of a specific nature at the University of Rhode Island.

Assuming we can achieve consensus with all involved in a relatively short time, I believe that this Academy for Quality can be ready to commence operations in the summer of this Centennial year. It is a birthday gift we give to ourselves and to the people of Rhode Island. I believe that it can change profoundly the quality of services we offer at this University and that it can have a significant impact on the quality of state government as well. I have asked Dr. John McCray to assume leadership in moving us through the organizational phase of this endeavor, and I know that he will bring to this challenge energy, imagination and persistence. But in making this Academy a reality, we will need the help of many people, including our own leaders at the University, the Governor, the leadership of the legislature, the business and labor communities and the people of the state in general. I have sought and received the full support of Governor Sundlun for this proposal, and we will be seeking the endorsement and the financial support of the business and labor communities of Rhode Island.

Quality is a major part of the vision for the University of Rhode Island, a star for us to steer by. But we will need more; we will need a vision which helps us reconcile the past with the future, our land-grant mission and tradition with a changed landscape and new realities in the marketplace for higher education. We need a vision which identifies our place in that marketplace, the <u>niche</u>, if you will, upon which this University can build its unique future, drawing to it the most qualified students and the most productive faculty and staff.

There was a time when the land grant mission of the University made that niche secure. The trinity of teaching, research and service was one of the great American inventions of the last century, and it gave America unquestioned world superiority in the utilization of our natural resources and particularly in large scale agriculture. Institutions like URI generated a rich flow of applied research, taught those research findings to the working people of the state and provided a host of services that strengthened both communities and families.

But over the years since World War II, the demand for more education for more people, more often, has generated a host of new institutions. Community colleges--perhaps the other great American contribution to higher education--have grown rapidly and now teach

the bulk of students from working and middle class families entering college in America. These community colleges and their cousins, the public technical colleges, now also provide much of the continuing education to workers, whether individually or through customized training programs for employers. And they are very efficient at what they do, offering good quality basic instruction at very low cost. CCRI is a wonderful example of the genre.

Further, the scene today has been altered by the maturation of the old normal schools. Many of these former teacher training colleges have now grown up as comprehensive universities, often serving large urban populations. They are institutions where the energy of the faculty is directed chiefly at the classroom, and they too are efficient and effective teaching institutions, staffed by well-prepared and dedicated faculty members. Here, Rhode Island College is such an institution, and the people of the state are fortunate to be served by our colleagues at RIC.

What is unique, then, to the land grant university today is our mission of research. Especially here, the University of Rhode Island has the singular responsibility for the scholarship of discovery, as Ernest Boyer has described it, and the responsibility to disseminate those discoveries through what he has called the scholarship of application. That is today the core of the land and sea grant mission, and we are well prepared to carry out that particular role in Rhode Island. We have assembled at the University an outstanding research faculty, and we have generally provided them with good facilities and, even more important, the time to experiment and read and think and talk and write. That is the vision Senator Morrill of Vermont had in 1862: public institutions, serving the public with research made public, paid for with public dollars.

Now, I think I can argue successfully that the universities created for this purpose have kept faith with the vision of their creators. What has changed dramatically, however, is the public capacity and commitment to paying for these research universities. As new public educational institutions have been created and as other pressing social problems have laid claim to the public treasury, government has shifted more and more of the responsibility for universities like URI onto the shoulders of its students. We have now reached the point here at URI that students from outside of Rhode Island pay the full cost of their education (and in the process bringing about $70 million a year into the Rhode Island economy). The funding we receive from the State of Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations now is, in effect, a subsidy to students whose home is Rhode Island, buying down their tuition to about one-third the cost of delivering that education to them.

The fact is that except for specific research funded by federal agencies or corporate sponsors, this research university is now almost entirely funded by tuition or what amounts to tuition subsidy. This research university is paid for by those who come here for the teaching mission of the University. Today, it is fair to ask, who pays for the research mission of URI? It is also fair to ask whether it is reasonable or even ethical to ask students, a comparatively small group of low-income individuals, to pay for the work which serves the state and the nation in profound ways, building a future not yet seen or understood, particularly if those students gain little direct benefit from it.

The problems inherent in this mismatch of mission and resources are endemic in this and many other land grant institutions, especially here in New England. This is the Gordian knot at which Dr. Boyer and his colleagues at The Carnegie Foundation are tugging. It is the cry of students who cannot get the classes they need in the current curriculum, and it is the source of the anger of those who say they cannot understand why faculty paid so well teach so little. It is the problem we encounter here each year when tenure and promotion decisions must be made. If a new vision for URI's future is to lead us out of this conundrum, that vision must be the blade that cuts the knot binding both our thinking and our future.

The vision I propose to you today can slice that knot, although it would turn on its head much of the way we currently do business. The model I propose is based on what we have learned in recent years about promoting effective and efficient student learning, and it will at the same time establish research--the quest for knowledge--as the fundamental work of the University. It would build upon our strengths, not our weaknesses. The vision recognizes the modern reality that the work of the world is accomplished in teams, and that in the development of collaborative strategies, characterized by intense communication, lies the path to success. Finally, it would allow us to build a finite number of world-class programs, and in that way achieve a stronger national and international reputation, with the positive consequences for resource acquisition that such a reputation brings. (Incidentally, that universities must do so is a conclusion to which even our colleagues at Harvard have come. As President Rudenstine said at his recent installation--a three day affair that you'll be pleased to know came off as planned--"we will have to be selective, concentrating our efforts on those few fields in which we can excel and that especially benefit from a strong university-wide commitment.")

I propose to you that in its one-hundredth year the University of Rhode Island be recreated, recreated in the shape of some eight

faculty and student research centers, each conceptualized broadly as a team with a mission 1) to advance the cause of knowledge in a multi-disciplinary area of institutional strength and 2) to develop the knowledge and skills of apprentices in that enterprise. By way of illustration only, one such unit might be the Center for Marine Studies, another the Center for the Study of Children and Families, still another the Center for the Study of Human Culture. Each center, as I would see it, would be led by a steering committee of senior faculty members and supported by other faculty associates whose careers are still developing. The professional growth of these associates through tenure and promotion would be a stated part of the work of the team.

The teams would be staffed by graduate students and by undergraduates, who would learn through doing and through association with working scholars. Their curriculum would be designed by the faculty of the Centers, with far greater involvement by each student in identifying learning goals and standards and the paths to achieving them. Eventually, every student at the University of Rhode Island would be a member of a research team, a distinctive characteristic shared, to my knowledge, by no other institution of our kind in this country. Emeriti faculty would be recalled to serve as advisors and evaluators to the Centers. An academic dean would accept logistical responsibility for each Center, and would be given considerable flexibility and autonomy to meet program goals, working with support units committed to quality service.

What such a model will do for the research enterprise at URI is clear to me. It will create a rich community of scholars at various stages of professional development, focused on targeted opportunities for service. What it will do for students may not be so readily apparent to some. But I believe that such a model as I have described can create a student culture, both academic and social, which will have learning at the center.

Let's look at the practices we now know will enhance student learning. The research is extensive in this regard, and those practices are outlined in the so-called "Wingspread Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," about which I have spoken before. We now know, for example, that "frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the [single] most important factor in student motivation and involvement." We know that the most effective learning is "collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated." A recent report of the Harvard Assessment Seminars focuses on a single main idea: "that students who get the most out of college, who grow the most academically and who are happiest, organize their time to include interpersonal activities with faculty members, or with

fellow students, built around substantive, academic work."

We know that the most effective learning is active, when students are not simply spectators to scholarship. We know that effective learning is achieved when there is prompt feedback on performance, as well as times for reflection on that feedback. We know that effective learning occurs when, as they say, there is time on task, when students spend as much of their time as possible on the purpose for which they attend college. We know that effective learning occurs when we communicate high expectation to our students and when we model high expectations of ourselves. And we know that effective learning occurs when we respect different learning styles and work to develop alternate approaches to knowledge. (Chickering and Gamson)

All of these "good practices" can be implemented under the model I have proposed to you. These centers will create, I believe, a new and more purposeful sense of community here at the University. They will bring faculty and students and staff together in a joint effort to achieve learning that has a purpose, that will make a real and measurable difference to Rhode Island and America. We will thus set high expectations for everyone. Student learning will be cooperative and active, and faculty members will function more in the model of the theater director or the coach. Students will take greater responsibility for their learning. They will get more and better feedback on their work and their progress. They will wrestle first hand with a variety of ethical issues, consciously built into the process of teaching through research. Work in the Centers, a source of social as well as academic identification, will slowly replace less admirable associations and endeavors. In the end, we will have educated a new breed of leaders, people specifically trained in analytical techniques, people who have studied closely with the leading minds in our nation, people who have learned to work as a team, people with vision and purpose. And we will have better, if differently, fulfilled our historic research and service missions.

Transformation of this kind is very hard work, requiring creative thinking as well as great persistence. The trick, of course, is to get there from here. For the past several months, the Joint Education Planning Committee, a group of which I am the chair and Dr. Kahn is the vice chair, has been wrestling mightily with a new vision statement, incorporating many of the concepts I have described to you. We now have that statement ready for transmittal to the Faculty Senate, the Student Senate and the Council of Deans for their review, comment and action, as appropriate. At the same time, the Council of Deans has been working on the development of a process by which we would identify the conceptual areas which our research centers would address.

I believe that we should consider seriously the concept put forward by Dr. Kahn, which would have faculty develop proposals for the establishment of specific centers, to be reviewed and evaluated against identified criteria and standards. The deans will complete their work by February 15th and, through JEPC, will put their recommendations before the various bodies of the University shortly thereafter.

With full recognition of how difficult the path ahead will be, but with equal recognition of the need to make timely decisions and the enhanced will to do so now present throughout this community, I will ask that debate and discussion be completed--at least formally--by the end of this academic year, so that a strategic plan can be put before the Board of Governors for full review and discussion this coming fall. I have asked our Provost, Dr. Swan, to provide the academic leadership of taking us through this process, working closely with the Student Life, Finance and University Relations divisions of the University. In the process, I will seek the good counsel of the Commissioner and of our alumni and our various advisory boards.

I will not pretend that the risks involved in striking out in such a different way are not significant. Because it is a distinct and unique way of accomplishing the work of a university, there is a real likelihood that some will misunderstand us. They will find it difficult to think of the University of Rhode Island in a way consistent with this vision. And although we know that all change is painful and that we must always expect some resistance to change, it is possible that in the climate of fear, of economic insecurity, which exists in our state and indeed in our nation today this degree of change will be too much for the body politic to endure.

But the alternatives to creative change are more grim yet. We are universally agreed, I believe, that the downward spiral of the University, a spiral that has paralleled the fortunes of the state, must be ended. To do so we must break out, we must burst out of the past, with a bold new plan that comprehends the future and makes the future ours. To do so is the best way to assure success, to achieve distinction for this University, to draw to us people and institutions who want to be associated with success. It is the best way to secure the resources necessary to our mission, and to assure the job security of all our employees.

Finally, I believe that this vision will allow us best to serve the working people of this state and this nation, the motive from which this University sprang some one hundred years ago. From John Washburn, our first president; to Howard Edwards, our longest serving president; to Carl Woodward, who brought us into the modern

era; to Francis Horn, our senior living president emeritus;, and through Warner Baum, Frank Newman and Ted Eddy, my more immediate predecessors; through each of their tenures the University of Rhode Island has served well, and it has served honorably. Like most institutions committed to serving the people, URI has been knocked around a bit over the years, but it keeps on going and it keeps on growing in stature and in wisdom and in leadership. And we will persist in that path of leadership--we will keep our eye on the prize--and we will prevail. As the African-American poet Gwendolyn Brooks described her children, our lesions are legion, but reaching is our rule. With your continued commitment and with renewed courage, we will make the University of Rhode Island the great institution which the good people of this fine state need and deserve. I thank you very much for this opportunity to serve you.